

Transaction Declined

by Garth Spencer

(note: this story previously appeared in the fanzine *BCSFazine* in 2004, and in the small magazine *Polar Borealis* in 2018)

Hrothgar Weems normally worked days, but the temp. agency had given him an emergency evening assignment at a time when he really couldn't pass it up. After a grueling six hours of transcription and word-processing corrections, and struggling with the client's unique brand of English, Hrothgar was exhausted and low-spirited; wending his way home at nearly midnight did not lighten his mood, and he was brooding about the debts he still couldn't cover, as he stepped out of the rapid transit terminal.

When a municipal clock struck the hour, a tall, dark figure stepped into his path. Hrothgar trucked over to one side, mumbling "Scuse me".

The dark figure moved with him, and stepped into his space.

"Hey!"

Two hands clapped onto Hrothgar's shoulders, and pulled him forward. Hrothgar, startled, raised his forearms and pushed off the hands, with difficulty.

"Hey, back off! I don't want -"

One hand shot out, clasped itself around Hrothgar's throat, and pulled him off his feet. The fanged mouth approached.

"Oh, what the hell," Hrothgar thought, so he went limp.

The dark figure paused, and in the faint street light he saw a frown on the distorted face. "What the hell is wrong with you?" the stranger asked.

Hrothgar found he was standing on his own again, and his throat was free. He scratched it. "You're a vampire, aren't you?" he said thinly. "Or are you just one of these Goth wannabes?"

The dark eyes widened as the faced frowned more deeply. "Goth boys?"

Hrothgar sighed. "Guess you're the real deal. Uh, some people actually want to be vampires. Not my party, but not many things are." He straightened up and lifted his chin. "So, do you just need a blood donation, or do you have to take my life, when you feed?"

The vampire moved away a little, looking slightly repulsed. “Whatever is the matter with you?” he asked. “This is the third time this year my prey hasn’t run, or screamed, hasn’t even resisted the bloodletting!”

Hrothgar took a long look at the taller man. “Oh, I see,” he said. “You want an answer before you give me one. Good enough. My deal is, I’m just fed up. I don’t get a lot out of life, I’ve given up expecting more out of life. If I live, if I die, it’s all the same to me, right now. Maybe you’re just meeting other people who feel the same way, but this year is your first time. What do you think?”

“But why?” the vampire burst out. “How can you live, and draw breath, and ... and ...” Just at the moment, he looked a lot like Hrothgar’s maternal uncle, when he was also baffled and offended. Also by something Hrothgar said, now that he thought about it.

Hrothgar shrugged wearily. “I dunno. Maybe I’m in the wrong line of work, or I can’t get enough work. Maybe there’s just too much plastic in my diet. Maybe I’m not making the right effort, to get some satisfaction.” He looked squarely at the dark, taller man.

The vampire looked squarely at Hrothgar.

After a moment the taller man stepped back. And again. Turning, he started running.

Hrothgar watched the figure retreat, realizing that he had freaked out a blood-sucking monster. Then he went to see if he could catch the last bus home.